RETHINKING GJIROKASTRA

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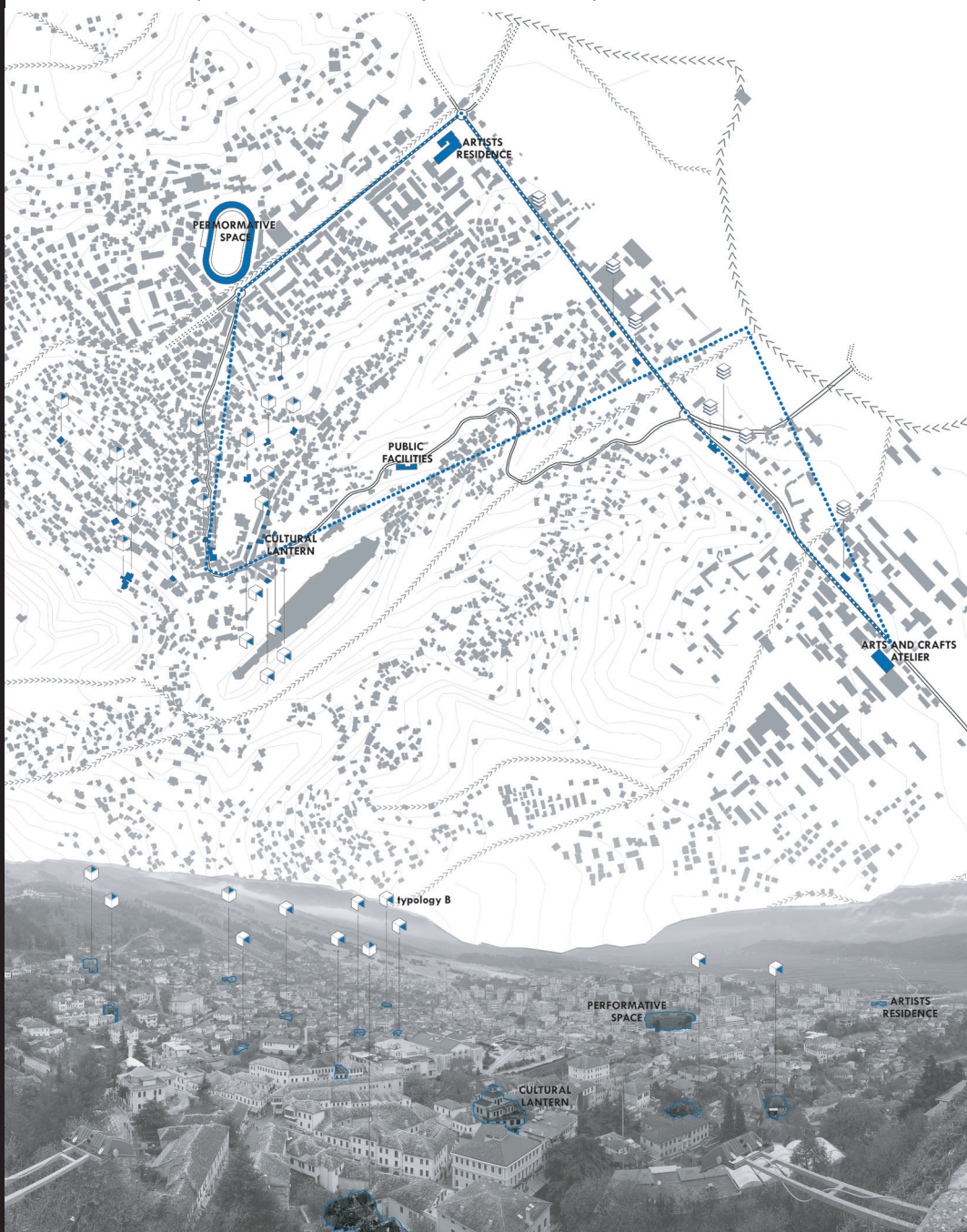
RETHINKING GJIROKASTRA

Can architecture and city planning stimulate hope and growth for shrinking cities?

A Project of the Joint International PhD Program IDAUP

POLIS University Albania / University of Ferrara Italy



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Can architecture and city planning stimulate hope and growth for shrinking cities?

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This publication is about a critical analysis of certain local situations which you can find also in other countries: the shrinking cities phenomenon. POLIS and their Italian partners, UNIFE, go through a sequence of "geography, place, history and culture" approaches. This publication scrutinizes a variety of issues, including established techniques and methodologies, when it comes to the reading of space and place, under specific social, economic, and political contexts. At the same time, they are opening up a spectrum of possibilities provided by all available sketches, drawings, etc., aiming at mapping and documenting regional realities and investigating the municipal potential. Top-down, centrally imposed planning schemes have long now shown their limitations and essential limited ends. The collapse of the centralized economy and planning brought new opportunities and new problems as well. Nowadays, some regions as capital cities grow fast and beyond their limits. Some other cities and regions are shrinking in terms of demography, urban importance, and economy. How to deal with it in a situation like South Albania? The publication of this case is systematic, rich in a body of scholarly, scientific work that leads to a direction of articulated public spaces, functions, and infrastructures that surpass the built environment and all obvious structural connotations. It is a promising work investing in systems and collaborative networks that bind the area to policies of cohabitation and sustainable choices, allow bottom-up, grassroots approach to bloom, and secure a resilient, inclusive vision for the area than in short term low-capacity assignments.

Dr. Fabrizio Aimar
Polytechnic University of Torino, ITALY

POLIS University is a pioneering institution in the fields of higher education, innovation and research. It is unique both in the Albanian and European contexts. Its joint International PhD Program with UNIFE - Ferrara University, Italy, has been for years and still is, an original scientific program in the international panorama. During the last decades, POLIS and its planning institute, Co-PLAN, have been developing a national vision and a methodology of spatial planning translated into two important documents: "Albania 2030 Manifesto" and "Regionalization of Albania". Since then, POLIS and UNIFE are further elaborating "regional puzzles" (https://ombresearchseries.org/). Saying this as a background, it can be said that their last publication on "Gjirokastra", is one of the latest elaborated pieces of the above-mentioned puzzles. The text represents good documentation of an alternative planning process and scientific speculation under the circumstances of the "shrinking cities" phenomena whilst showing - at the same time - how a university cannot be merely a theoretical institution but also have a clear social responsibility and mission. A team of city scientists, professors and students of POLIS University and Ferrara University has been mobilized during the last years in the region of Gjirokastra, aiming to assist bottom-up processes of municipal envisioning and territorial planning, as well as strategies and instruments to cope with demographic and economic depression. Accepting the existence of such a problem and dealing with it, is the first positive action to inspire serious improvements for the future. The experience shown here demonstrates how municipal and city planning cannot be treated simply as a developmental and governance instrument, by 'simply obeying' to the existing standard legislation, but it can also be transformed creatively into a smart tool for a local "developmental leap", and promote further regional coordination as well as local improvements.

Dr. Valerio Perna
University of "La Sapienza" Rome, ITALY

Preface

Gjirokastra.
Between the "UNESCO City" status and the phenomenon of "Shrinking Cities".

Gjirokastra is one of the most beloved cities in Albania and beyond in the region. The city with extraordinary historical values, and with unique traditions and landscape, is rightly included in the UNESCO list. Gjirokastra has always been, and continues to be, among the main settlements that serve as a reference for the development of southern Albania, and the cross-border area of northwestern Greece.

After the 90s the city has entered a demographic and economic recession that is typical for those inhabited centers that face the global phenomenon of "shrinking cities". Often this has been considered a local shortcoming, typical of this city. In fact, the phenomenon occurs everywhere in the world, where there are dramatic social, economic, and political changes, such as those in Albania after the fall of the "Berlin Wall".

Meanwhile, the phenomenon is typical for developed countries in terms of market economy, especially when a certain city, region, or country goes through the process of "de-industrialization", the transition from industrial development to services and other sectors.

The opening of Albania's borders in 1991, the introduction of free movement and market economy, the closure and privatization without criteria of local factories and manufacturing industries, the fact that they did not go through a technological transformation in accordance with the new economic-political conditions, etc., - all these together stimulated a depressive atmosphere in the city. As a result of this situation: i) many families and individuals emigrated to Greece, Europe, and the USA; ii) many others moved to the metropolitan area of Tirana; iii) mountain villages were almost emptied both by the emigration abroad, and by the migration to big cities or the capital; iv) departure especially of the youth.

Beyond that, local, regional and central authorities and certain international partners have tried to curb the phenomenon as much as possible. The inclusion of Gjirokastra in the UNESCO list was a turning point. Already investments in infrastructure, agriculture and tourism have increased.

Today it can be said that Gjirokastra is a tourist destination, but suffers from a lack of human resources, especially young people. Institutions such as the County, Prefecture, courts, university, hospital, or other regional services, are one more reason to give more importance and a regional and cross-border development function to this municipality. The project of transforming the historical-museum center into a "business district" has given hope that things can be different and better.

It is now clear that the Municipality should be better acquainted with the phenomenon of "shrinking cities" and learn from other cases in Europe and in the world: how other settlements have been gradually transformed and turned for the better? How investments, enterprises and residents have been gradually assimilated? It is evident today that Gjirokastra from a municipality with an "industrial-agricultural" character, should make a "shift" towards a services center with an "administrative-touristic-transitory" character. The villages need to be reactivated to bring life to the whole territory where there is real potential, authentic churches, and natural resources, to revive tourism and the agriculture with unique products.

The purpose of this publication is to demystify the phenomenon of "shrinking cities" in the context of Gjirokastra, and to identify strategies and instruments that will help the city out of this transitional state. The publication in question is part of a series of visions developed over the years within the International Doctoral Program (PhD) between POLIS University, Tirana (Albania) and the University of Ferrara (Italy).

For more see:
https://ombresearchseries.org/

This series which is also documented by the Library of Congress in USA, has first built a territorial development vision for the country and a proposal for its regionalization in the framework of European integration. Furthermore, each year a region has been selected and detailed with projects and specific development instruments to each region. The most recent region to date is Gjirokastra. Previously, development programs have been drafted for the regions: Durres-Tirana metropolis, the southern Riviera region, the Seman watershed area, the cross-bordering municipalities of Shkodra (north) and Dropull (south), the regions of Prishtina (Kosovo) and Tetovo (Northern Macedonia), etc.

We hope you will find this study valuable both for communities and local authorities in the processes of local regional development, but will also it can hopefully serve as a reference for academic, student and research communities in their daily scientific work.

Prof. Dr. Besnik Aliaj
Rector of POLIS University, Tirana

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introduction

1.1
Demystifying the concepts of “shrinking cities & urban depopulation”.
A theoretical review that could be useful to the case of Gjirokastra, Albania.
Besnik Aliaj
Sotir Dhamo

Driverless transition: the value of autonomous mobility for sustainable urban development

PhD. Gian Andrea Giacobone
University of Ferrara / Italy.

Abstract
In the last two centuries, contemporary cities have been progressively changing their urban landscapes according to the functional necessities of the auto-centered transport system but, over the years, that model of consumption has contributed negatively to the environmental degradation of public spaces. Nevertheless, with the advent of autonomous vehicles, urban planners have new opportunities of rethinking urban mobility in a new and sustainable way by completely reshaping transport infrastructures and reorganizing land uses for the future development of more accessible and livable cities. In fact, autonomous vehicles are expected to transform the use and experience of the vehicle itself but also change the overall infrastructure design, which, in turn, will have a great impact on urban planning, location choices, and land use organization. For these reasons, this contribution sheds lights on the urban transition to autonomous transport by reporting the main advantages – in terms of safety, social and economic inclusion, freeing of public space and sustainability of the urban environment – that the new technology is able to offer to urban planners for improving the quality of the existing mobility systems. Moreover, the paper highlights the benefits of autonomous vehicles by describing briefly an ongoing research experiment that is testing the use of driverless cars in the real world. Considering this, the manuscript gives urban planners a new perspective capable of adapting spatial planning and land-use organization to future and uncertain challenges related to the implementation of autonomous vehicles in the existing urban context. In particular, the opportunity of assessing the impact of those vehicles on the existing cities will prepare urban planners to play a strategic role in defining a common urban development policy framework for helping European cities to evolve in perfect symbiosis with the new and disruptive driverless technology.

Since the nineteenth century, the history of everyday urban transportation is clearly represented by the auto-centered transport system. The automobile and its supporting infrastructures have dominated the landscape of our contemporary cities, shaping, at the same time, every aspect of urban development according to the functional needs of vehicle transport (Freund and Martin, 1993). Over the years, the auto-centered phenomenon has offered to people great advantages in terms of privacy and freedom, though its individualized mode of consumption has contributed to a progressive environmental degradation in the urban public space, such as smog, vehicle accidents and traffic congestion (Sheller and Urry, 2000). However, during the last twenty years, the automotive industry has created new opportunities in redefining the existing auto-centered transport model in order to conceive and develop a safer and more sustainable urban infrastructure, capable of ending the negative effects caused by the existing transport system (Riggs, Appleyard and Johnson, 2020). Nowadays, the automotive industry has initiated many research studies that rethink the use of the auto-centered system by developing a new vehicle typology equipped with sophisticated technological features – named Advanced Driving Assistant Systems (ADAS). This technology transforms conventional cars into autonomous vehicles (AVs), also called automated or self-driving vehicles (Fregnant and Kockelman, 2015). This new technology allows the AVs both to drive themselves in the existing roads with high driving precision and to navigate many types of roadways and environmental contexts with almost no direct human input (Lipson and Kurman, 2016) (Fig.1).
The upcoming advent of this disruptive technology has made it clear that AVs will become increasingly prevalent and more integrated into our urban society, and they will significantly affect urban mobility conditions in the future contemporary cities (Milakis, van Arem and van Wee, 2017). In particular, most of the changes are expected to transform the use and the experience of the vehicle itself but also to modify the entire infrastructure design, which, in turn, will have a great impact on urban development, location choices, and land-use organization (Gavanas, 2019). For this reason, in order to consider the possible impacts of AVs in the near future, urban planners have to start thinking about transportation infrastructure in a different way, because spatial planning and the organization of land use will need to adapt to new and uncertain challenges related to the implementation of AVs in our urban spaces. Reflecting on the importance of this change, the European Commission has also started to consider AVs as an important implementation that promotes an intelligent transport system. Their innovative technology could contribute to the improvement of the overall quality of the current urban transport system in terms of safety, congestion and emissions (Papa and Ferreira, 2018), which were dictated by the previous auto-centered system. In fact, AVs present many potential advantages that can help the European Commission to strengthen its e-orts to achieve speci-c targets for sustainable development by fostering smart, accessible and inclusive urban mobility in all the European cities (Gavanas, 2019). In this context, urban planners will have the chance to evaluate the potential contribution of these new vehicles to the economic, social and environmental pillars of urban sustainability (Purvis, Mao and Robinson, 2019) and play a strategic role to plan a common policy framework of urban planning for helping European cities evolve in perfect symbiosis with the new technology. An important advantage of AVs is primarily related to road safety. The ADAS technology is able to reconfigure tasks and responsibilities of the drivers because they can prevent human error (Giacobone, 2018) – usually related to the brain's cognitive limitations in attention (Drive, 2001) – and consequently reduce road accidents, including protecting the lives of vulnerable categories such as pedestrians or cyclists. The advantages of ADAS technology are also addressed in changing the availability and quality of transportation experience because the automation of skill-based control makes urban travelling more comfortable and efficient than human guidance through smoother braking and finer speed adjustment (Cummings, 2014). This can affect both the value of time and the perceived cost for the travelers because

Fig.1 / Waymo's self-driving car operating without human oversight. The interface is designed to build trust with passengers. Source / Waymo, website

Fig.2 / Ringspeed's vision of the future of driverless cars as a living space on wheels. Source / Ringspeed, website.

they can easily replace the task of driving with other activities (Meyer et al., 2017), transforming the vehicle itself into a third living space conceived for conviviality and socialization (Lewin, 2017) (Fig.2).

Considering this, another benefit of AVs is associated with inclusion because it makes the vehicle accessible for everyone, including the fragile people who cannot drive conventional vehicles, such as people with permanent or temporary disabilities, the elderly and underage travelers. In economic terms, AVs also promote the inclusion of people who cannot afford the costs of car ownership and use Mobility as a Service (MaaS) by enhancing shared mobility, new public mobility services (Pickford and Chung, 2019) (Fig.3) and, hence, reducing the overall cost of personal and public transportation (Heinrichs, 2016). From an urban planning perspective, inclusion enables mobility infrastructure to better service the less accessible urban areas around a country, facilitating, at the same time, the everyday commuting without forcing people to abandon small towns for reaching more dense and lively cities (Zhong et al., 2020). These aspects become very important for urbanization because they enable people to have more options where to live or work (Lipson and Kurman, 2016), and, hence, they can reduce the phenomenon of urban depopulation in those cities located in the too-distant surrounding countryside and currently seem isolated and segregated from the available transport infrastructure of a given country. Again, another advantage of AV for urban planning lies in the precision of driving because it increases the efficiency of urban transportation in many aspects. The energy-saving strategy, called platooning, can save fuel and reduce both emissions

Fig.3 / Reanult's concept of an autonomous vehicle specifically designed for the future of shared mobility. Source / Reanult, website.

Fig.4 / Voyage's autonomous vehicle testing a shared mobility service in public roads involving a retirement community in Florida. Source: Voyage, website.

and air pollution (Davila, 2013), while efficient driving can significantly reduce urban congestion due to the ability of AVs to coordinate travel behaviors and operate with relatively higher occupancy rates than traditional vehicles (Hawkins and Nurul Habib, 2018). This phenomenon inevitably leads to the freeing of public space, giving new opportunities for urban planners to restore the degradation of the urban environment. Indeed, the latter may be dedicated to increasing green areas and open-air recreational spaces to enrich the pedestrian environment, especially in the historical centers of European cities, which were designed before the widespread use of auto-centered transport. The same effect can also be achieved by the AVs' ability to reduce the hidden cost of searching for on-street parking, as the activity itself negatively impact the sustainability of the urban environment through congestions, accidents, fuel consumption, air pollution and human livability degradation (Soup, 2006). Moreover, the capacity of AVs to drive themselves even after dropping off their passengers can change the approach for the parking space management, because, in a context where the AVs are shared or integrated into public service, the parking lots of conventional vehicles can be drastically reduced and even eliminated in high dense districts due to the flexibility of AVs in the use of urban space. In this case, urban planners have the opportunity to use free space to regenerate urban spaces and reorganize land use, especially dedicated to the pedestrian environment, and to decrease the auto-centered system in favor of more sustainable and walkable urban spaces that can foster the use of the body, promote physical activity and hence contribute to making a city

healthier, livable and safe (Dorato, 2020).
One significant example that highlights the benefits of the AVs is the public experiment conducted by Voyage, a software company that aims to create a shared transport service for people who cannot drive because of the limitations of old age (Cameron, 2018) (Fig.4). The company is testing its fleet of AVs in the real world, specifically involving a retirement community in Florida.
The AVs' service allows the elderly to remain connected to other areas of the city in a completely safe condition and without owning a private car. In this case, the vehicles' density and traffic congestion can be controlled and reduced at a minimum, giving the parking areas the chance of being transformed into other walkable spaces by creating a calmer and safer neighborhood for all the community. Moreover, since people maintain their freedom, they cannot feel isolated from other urban places anymore. On the contrary, they are stimulated to move more frequently, and at the same time, increasing the social relations without abandoning their living places. The experiment is still in progress. It presents many opportunities for urban planners to collect and assess data for future planning strategies addressed to improving the efficiency and sustainability of the existing cities and their mobility infrastructures.
To conclude, the complex phenomenon of driverless mobility expects to come up with new opportunities capable of changing both the use of conventional vehicles and the current transportation system. The new concept also is expected to change the accessibility of many urban areas of future cities. This is because driverless technology can have a great impact on urban development due to its ability to innovate the efficiency and the quality of transport infrastructures and to reorganize land use for fostering sustainability, livability in future human-scale cities. Considering this, in the coming years, urban planners should focus on understanding the impact of AVs in the urban space and take advantage of the potential benefits offered by the autonomous system to prepare themselves for new urban challenges, finding, at the same time, innovative solutions to arrest the negative effects of the auto-centered system, in favor of a more sustainable and smart urban development.

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Fig.5 / Examples of ear-market public transportation busses that could be used to brand Gjirokastra

Dynamic heritage: the case of Havana

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Abstract
This text discusses some practices and theories related to urban planning and architectural design in a UNESCO listed city, promoting a shared approach on the theme of Urban regeneration in Historical contexts. The practices and theories derive from researches and didactic experiences that I have developed with other professors and students in Havana, Cuba.
The first one with CUJAE Instituto Superior Politécnico José Antonio Echeverrìa was the international cooperation program PatrIndArch on Water Heritage (2013-15), in which CUJAE Cuba, University of Alicante Spain, University of Padova and University of Ferrara were involved.
From this pedagogical experience came the opportunity to program an international Seminar dedicated to "Water, Architecture and Landscape in Europe", held in November 2014 in Instituto Universitario del Agua y de las Ciencias Ambientales, Universidad de Alicante, where I participated with professors and researchers from the Universities of Ferrara, Padova, Alicante, Coimbra, Bucarest, Valenciennes et Hainaut-Cambrésis, with proceedings published in 2015.
This text is mainly derived from the PRIA research program "URB_HE Urban Heritage Conservation as vector of social equity", in which I participated (2015-17), and which was financed as an "Interdisciplinary research project" by the University of Ferrara under a call for proposals dedicated to defining new international fields of research. This research and pedagogical activity wwas related to the concepts of rehabilitation, regeneration, heritage conservation, which were considered like "moving concepts". The emblem of this dynamic is the evolution of the concept of heritage: from tangible to intangible, from monuments to cultural landscape. Havana and its territory represent a privileged case study from which to observe not only influences of European and North American culture on the Global South cities, but also original hybridizations deriving from the intertwining of different practices related to urban planning and architectural design in UNESCO cities.

The prevailing polycentric structure of the city of Havana, outlined in the phases of its development and in the plans preceding the Revolution, is radicalized through policies implemented in the decade of consolidation (1965-1975) and in the following so-called Five Year's Plan. According to the concept that '... the city is a territorial collectivity, a human community, both considered in its totality and at the level of each of the parts that compose it' (Segre R. and Lopez Rangel R., 1982: 217)[1], there is the possibility to observe how some of the most complex transformation actions of the modern city are articulated.
First of all, actions linked to a first phase of demolition and thinning of historic centers that evolve towards opposing policies of conservation and reconstruction of the built heritage, partly result in the relocation of inhabitants and gentrification. Secondly, the permanence of the urban plans for Havana – from those preceding the Revolution to the most recent ones - and in contemporary regeneration projects environmental systems along the waterfronts play a strategic role, tend to infiltrate the urban fabric in sectors relevant for the development of the city. Thirdly, the flexible hierarchy of the urban structure favored by the existing sensitive orthogonal grid in some parts of the city of Havana - in particular in the Vedado district - allows different conditions and situations to coexist, both from a morphological and settlement point of view, and they are recognized over time as heritage values by communities and institutions.

From demolition to reconstruction to displacement
The theories of the avant-garde developed in the CIAM, which in the 1920s and 1930s proposed the demolition of ancient and obsolete areas in the historic centers of European cities, reverberate in some plans and transformation projects of the central areas of Havana[2] starting from the late 1940s. In those years the area of La Habana Vieja was considered unhealthy, and the concept of rehabilitation was used to justify demolition projects and thinning plans. In 1955 the Junta Nacional de Planificacion de Cuba was established with the main objective of drawing up a master plan capable of guiding the urban development of the city. The development of the Master Plan was carried out under the direction of José Luis Sert and his studio TPA Town Planning Associates, in which Paul Lester Weiner and Paul Schultz also worked[3]. Settled in the United States, Sert was at the time president of the CIAM and this plan, while evidently affected by some of the theories that had been developed in previous congresses, presents interesting innovations in the ways in which it defines, for example, the relationship between city and water.
Starting from a zoning by social classes and functions, this plan takes into consideration the tendencies that different parts of the city had shown, including tourism in particular. This plan, while providing some radical replacement interventions at the heart of the historic city and in the Centro Habana area, it modifies the road layout and also the number and size of the urban blocks (manzana) in the historic center much less than what was foreseen through the application of CIAM's principles. After the 1959 Revolution, the plan was not carried out and some of the demolition interventions that had been proposed in parts of the historic city were not followed up.

In the last decades another practice was developed which, starting from the competences of the Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad de La Habana directed by

[1] / Institute for Physical Planning, "El esquema del Plan Director de La Habana", Habana 2, in Arquitectura/Cuba, 341/2, 1973: 30; in Segre R. and Lopez Rangel R. (1982) Architettura e territorio nell'America Latina, Milano: Electa.

[2] / Zardoya Loureda, 2012: 16-18.
[3] / Lester Weiner, P., Sert, J.L. and Schultz, P. 1959.

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